

Houston Chronicle ThisWeek

Thursday, Oct. 17, 2002
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INSIDE



WRIGHT ON TARGET

Shawn Nacol is sharing his gift for the wit of the written word with the reading of his latest play, *Trophy Wife* (an extramarital affair).

Page 4

Page 4 - ★★

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FACES IN THE CROWD

Native playwright shares gift 'for words and wit'

By FLORI MEEKS
Chronicle correspondent

Shawn Nacol says he has an invisible fishhook in his head.

"Someone will say something, and it will stay there and start building scar tissue," the playwright said.

That was the process that led to *Trophy Wife* (an extramarital affair), which went on to win first place in the Texas division of the 2002 Southwest Conference for New Plays.

An offhand remark by Nacol's sister inspired the play about a woman whose sole purpose in life is to snag a well-to-do married man.

"I heard her say, 'You know what, I'd make a great second wife,'" Nacol said.

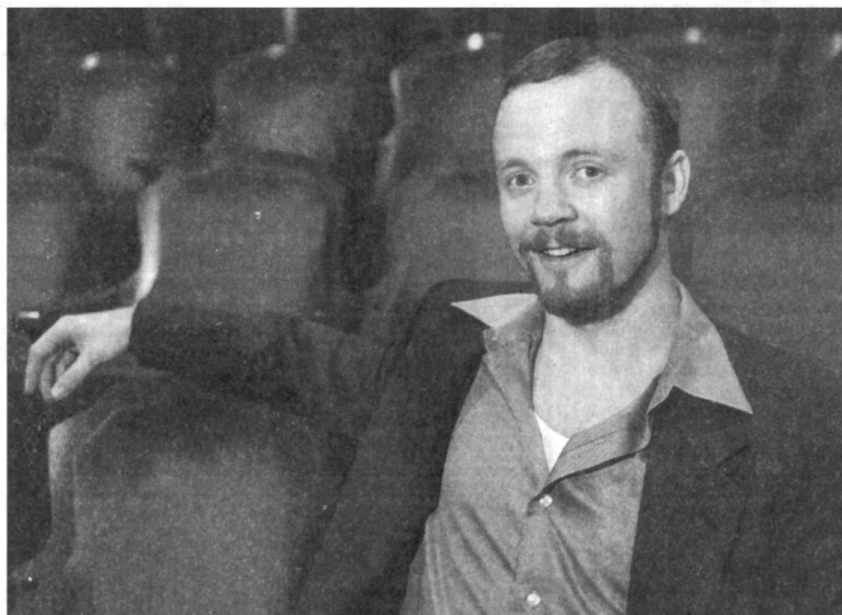
Nacol's Houston family and friends got a chance to experience the end-product of Nacol's creative process last week when Stages Repertory Theatre hosted a reading of *Trophy Wife* directed by K. David Cochran.

The reading packed a lot of emotional punch for Nacol, a native Houstonian who graduated from the Kinkaid School in 1988 and who grew up in Tanglewood.

"It was so unbelievably great," he said. "Last night I had teachers who taught me in the fifth grade show up. And it meant so much to have my family there. It enriched the play amazingly."

The experience was memorable for the audience members as well. Film producer Howard Griffith of Charter Films says he believes the play is destined for Broadway.

"I thought the reading was great," he said. "It had great flow, the humor was there. It was a very Manhattan script. I watched the audience, and ev-



Dave Rossman photo

Shawn Nacol is enjoying the fruits of his creative labor watching his plays be put on in both Houston and New York City. The Kinkaid School graduate recently completed *Trophy Wife* (an extramarital affair), which was read at Stages Repertory Theatre.

everyone seemed to get it. It never got dull."

Rachel Applegate, managing director of the Kinkaid Theatre, is a former New Yorker. She says Nacol managed to capture the essence of a New York woman.

"He gave each character a true voice with one-liners, zingers and wonderful character theories on life," Applegate said. "What a gift he has for words and wit."

In the audience with Applegate was Patty Edwards, the Kinkaid School's fine arts chairwoman.

"I haven't laughed so hard in years, one point to tears during the bathroom monologue," Edwards said. "The audience

seemed to forget this was a staged reading. The stage was alive through Shawn's words."

Trophy Wife was written in the same vein as the Hollywood comedies of the 1930s and 40s, Nacol said. It introduces the audience to Kate, whose aunt has groomed her since childhood to find a happily married man of means to make her own. But when Kate finds her perfect man she has to send him away. He's a bachelor.

"The play's about commitment and divorce and the emotional entanglements that get in the way," Nacol said.

Though Nacol didn't initially set out to become a playwright, he's known since his teen years that he wanted to work in enter-

tainment.

As a child, Nacol sang at church and special events. His robust singing style caught the attention of others.

"People said, hey, you're loud, You should do a show," Nacol said. "Singing led to theater, and theater led to writing."

Once he started writing Nacol knew he found his calling.

"One of the things that I love about theater is it's right there in front of you. There's an immediate response," he said.

That's not to say Nacol finds it easy to put his work before others.

"It feels like a grill, and you're a steak," he said. "You hope you'll be delicious, and you won't be burnt."

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Shawn Nacol, on having his plays performed

Nacol wrote his first play as a student at Columbia University in New York. *Happy Cage* (a situation tragedy) appears on stage as a 1950s style television comedy. But just off stage, its obvious bad stuff is happening.

"It was a pretty creepy play," Nacol said.

Another Nacol piece, *Slay Belles* (a Christmas stalking) is about two children who are convinced Santa Claus is out to catch them and kill them. It was inspired after the fishhook in Nacol's mind caught a joke from his uncle about throwing a reindeer out the window.

Slay Belles won the Best Play and Audience Choice Awards at the 10th annual Edward Albee Theatre Conference.

Also by Nacol are *After Ours* (a light noir), *Venus in Fuzz* (a hittin' myth) and *Two With Nature*.

Currently, he is working on *Drawing Monsters* (a weird tale). The Depression-era horror play is based on a true story.

Nacol also has been commissioned to write a three-character thriller he's naming *Stiff Lake* (a guilty party).